

A *Tracts*
DISCOURSE

Concerning the
Use *and* Advantages
OF THE
GOSPEL REVELATION:

As it was delivered
On three several *Sundays*, at the *New Chapel*,
in the *Broad Way*, *Westminster*.

In which are obviated
The principal Objections contained in a
Book, Entitled, *Christianity as old as the
Creation*.

By *HENRY STEBBING*, D.D.

L O N D O N:

Printed for J. PEMBERTON, at the *Buck*,
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A

DISCOURSE

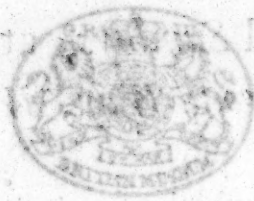
Containing the

Life and Adventures

OF THE

GOSSIP REVOLUTION

As a



The principal of the same contained in a
Book, entitled, "The Gossip Revolution,"
London.

BY THE AUTHOR OF THE

GOSSIP REVOLUTION

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TO THE
CONGREGATION
OF THE
NEW CHAPEL
IN THE
Broad-Way, Westminster :

THIS
DISCOURSE

Is inscribed by

Their Most Obedient,

Humble Servant,

HENRY STEBBING.

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TO THE
CONGREGATION

OF THE
NEW CHURCH

IN THE
BROADWAY, WESTMINSTER:

THIS
DISCOURSE

WAS DELIVERED BY

HENRY STUBBS



THE P R E F A C E.



Y Intention in publishing this Discourse, is to offer some Assistance to common Readers, to enable them to judge for themselves of the Merits of the Cause now on foot, between Christianity and Infidelity. As this Dispute comprehends a Variety of Questions, it is necessary that each Question be treated separately. The first, and that which makes the main Subject of the Controversy, as it stands at present, is this, To what Use does Revelation serve? And to this single Point I have confined my self in the following Treatise.

The Writer whom I have more immediately in View, is a great Dealer in Words, and has made shift to fill a large Volume with what (if he had studied Perspicuity) might have been much better laid together within the Compass of a few Sheets of Paper. This will justify any Answerer, who

P R E F A C E.

who, instead of following him in his own Way, (which would be endless) shall take the Liberty to cast the Controversy into a new Method, and to bring the Point to as speedy an Issue as he can. One would imagine that a great deal cannot be necessary to shew whether Revelation be good for any thing or not. I have set down shortly and plainly, what I apprehend to be the true Use of it; and endeavoured, in going along, to clear my Scheme of every Difficulty to which I could suspect it would be thought liable. If among these, this Writer's Objections shall be found to make a very mean Appearance, I cannot help it. I know not that I have omitted any which speak directly to the Point; and as it is not my Business to make Objections for him, (that is, to find Difficulties where there are none) so neither am I bound to be, because he is resolved to be, impertinent.

I thought it proper to say thus much, that the Reader may know what he is to expect. The rest must be submitted to his Judgment.





Of the USE of the
Gospel Revelation, &c.

ROM. viii. 3, 4.

For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin condemned sin in the flesh;

That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit.



THE Apostle's Design in this Epistle was to offer to *Jews* and *Gentiles* such Considerations, as might be proper to persuade them to embrace the Christian Faith. And one Consideration he
B offers,

offers, equally proper with respect to both; to wit, the Danger they were under from their present State, and the Advantages that would arise upon their coming to Christ, and embracing his Doctrine. When Men are called upon to take up a new Religion, it is natural for them to expect to be told what they shall gain by the Exchange; and if there are no good Purposes served by the new Religion, which are not as well provided for by the old one, every reasonable Man will think himself justified in rejecting all such new Pretensions, as unworthy of God, who cannot be supposed to do any thing in vain. This was one great Prejudice against the Gospel at its first setting out; many both of the *Jews* and of the *Gentiles* paying little Attention to the Preachers of it, upon this Presumption in each respectively, that they were secure under the Profession of their old Religion.

That which was an Obstruction to the Faith at first, has in these last Ages been the Cause of great Apostacy: And those who perhaps upon Motives which they care not to speak out, have entertain'd a Dislike to the Gospel, have found no Way more effectual to bring it into Discredit, than the setting it forth at best as a mere useless Institution. If you ask them what Religion we are to have in lieu of Christianity, they will answer you, Natural Religion; which
they

they say is absolutely sufficient for every Purpose which can be intended by any reasonable Religion. I shall suppose every one to be fully apprized what is meant by natural Religion; to wit, that it is that Rule or Law of Life which results from the very Nature of Man, consider'd as a reasonable Creature; founded upon the Belief of a God and a Providence, and supported by the Expectation of Rewards and Punishments in a Life to come. This is the only Law which, in the Opinion of many, was necessary for Man; nay, the only Law which God could have given to Man, consistently with his Wisdom and Goodness: And if this could be as fully proved, as it has been confidently asserted, it would stand as an insuperable Bar to any Evidence that could be offer'd, to shew that the Gospel came from God. It is well worth the while then to consider, whether the Gospel stands clear of this Imputation, and to shew what those Ends are, worthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, which are answered by the coming in of the Gospel, and are not sufficiently provided for by the Law of Nature without it.

Those who cry up the Sufficiency of the Law of Nature, I take it for granted, must have in view some particular Set of Principles, which they apprehend to contain a compleat System of natural Religion. For

do but take natural Religion as it subsists among the *Hottentots*, and I suppose you will not see much Reason to boast of it. These Gentlemen shall be at liberty to chuse what System they please; *Aristotle's*, or *Plato's*, or *Cicero's*, or (which perhaps they will like much better than any of them) one of their own dressing. The first Question that will arise upon the Case is this, *viz.* Whether it be right to infer from what we know at present concerning natural Religion, that it was, or might have been, the Result of mere Reason, without any Help from Revelation. I think, I confess, that there is no Way of supporting such an Inference as this: For it is one thing to be able to discover Truth, and another to discern or apprehend it, when proposed to the Understanding under proper Advantages. All the Propositions in *Euclid* were as true from the very first as they are now, but they were not always known to be so; and I believe it will not be denied, that there may be yet some Truths not discover'd, which, if they were discover'd, would appear as clear to the Understanding as those which we know. You will say perhaps, that the Principles of natural Religion are plain and easy; and you will say right. But to whom are they plain and easy? Why, to those who see them in the same Light that we do; and so are all things else to those who have

have been taught to understand them. Reason rightly exercis'd and carefully improv'd, may carry us a great way in the Knowledge of Religion, as well as it does in the Knowledge of Arts and Sciences. But Reason may be corrupted; and there are even now Multitudes of Men in the World, who understand as little of natural Religion, (as we are used to describe it) almost, as the Brutes. So that, in my Apprehension, there is no such thing as coming at any certain Knowledge, in this Case, how much Reason alone can do, but by Experience; and that we have Experience to rely upon, we cannot be secure, unless it were first proved that there never has been any Revelation in the World, from which Reason might borrow any Assistance. If there was a Revelation from the Beginning, which was transmitted down to the succeeding Ages, and repeated as Occasion served, it will be impossible to ascertain what Influence it might have, in framing the Opinions even of those who did not live under the immediate Advantages of it. So that they who in arguing against Revelation, set out upon this Principle, That Reason alone is sufficient, build upon a very weak Foundation, and in effect beg the thing that ought to be proved.

I thought it proper to give this Hint, that I might remove a Prejudice which seems to

to have great Weight with some, who because they can reason well upon the Being of a God, and a future State, and set forth, with great Accuracy and Exactness, the several Obligations that Men are under in vertue of their being reasonable Creatures, are apt presently to make Scorn of the Gospel; not considering, that for aught that appears from better Arguments, that very Knowledge which they set up in Defiance of the Gospel, may, in a great Measure, have been owing to the Light of the Gospel. To come now to the Point in hand.

In order to judge of the Usefulness of the Gospel, the true way will be to admit every thing which the Gospel pretends to, or supposes concerning itself, and then see what new Light naturally arises from it, and what Effect it must be supposed to have had upon the general State of Religion throughout the World. If the Question were asked, Of what Use is Civil Government? You must imagine a Civil Government as actually in Being, and then consider the Consequences of it. And so in this Enquiry concerning the Usefulness of the Gospel, you must conceive it as a Revelation actually subsisting in the same Manner, and under the same Circumstances in which it declares itself to have subsisted, and then examine what we are the better for it. In this way of stating the Case, there is nothing demanded to be granted,

granted, which, in the Order of Reasoning, ought first to be proved. For we do not pretend to argue, that because the Gospel is useful, therefore it is a divine Revelation. If we did, it would be necessary to prove the Usefulness of the Gospel, antecedently to any Supposition of its being a Revelation. But when the Argument proceeds thus; The Gospel is useless, therefore it is no Revelation; the Gospel has certainly a Right to be suffered to speak for itself, and to tell us what it pretends to; and it will then lie upon those who deny the Gospel, to disprove those Pretensions, and to shew that no such Purposes could have been answered by it; which they can no otherwise do, than by shewing that such Pretensions are in themselves absurd and unreasonable. Thus much being premised, there are two principal Points which I would offer to your Consideration, *viz.* 1. The Hope which the Gospel offers to all who are willing to accept it. And, 2. The Methods which the Providence of God has thought fit to make use of to support this Hope in the World. And if, in both these Respects, it can be made appear, that the bringing in of the Gospel has been greatly serviceable to the Ends of Religion, I shall suppose the Mind of every serious Enquirer to be fully prepared for the Consideration of those Proofs which have a direct

direct Tendency to shew that it came from God.

The first Head of Enquiry, is, What is that Hope which the Gospel offers to all who are willing to accept it? And the whole of it, I take to be comprised in those Words of St. Paul, which I have just now read to you, Rom. viii. 3, 4. *For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the Flesh, God sending his own Son in the Likeness of sinful Flesh; and for Sin condemned Sin in the Flesh; that the Righteousness of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit.* The Sentence is imperfect, and must be thus supplied: *For what the Law could not do, in that it was weak through the Flesh, God sending his own Son in the Likeness of sinful Flesh, hath effected, &c.* So that something there was which the Law of Nature (for of this Law he speaks as well as of the Jewish) could not do, and which is provided for by the Gospel. And what this is, we learn from the foregoing Verses, which run in these Words; *There is therefore now no Condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit: For the Law of the Spirit of Life in Jesus Christ, hath made me free from the Law of Sin and Death.* So that what the Gospel hath effected, and the Law could not do, is the setting us free from the Law of Sin and Death; that is, the releasing

leasing us from Sin, and from Death, which is the Wages of Sin.

That this Account which *St. Paul* gives of the first and principal End of the Gospel, is agreeable to the whole Scope and Purport of the sacred Writings, is a Thing so well understood, that it needs no Proof. From whence thus much should be observed in Justice to natural Religion, That the Gospel ascribes to it no such Deficiency or Imperfection; as if supposing that what Reason shews to be right and fitting, had been constantly practised, it would not have render'd us acceptable to God. The Law *was weak*; but it was *through the Flesh*; that is, by means of fleshly Appetite, which had led Men to sin against it; and it is upon this sinful Estate, that the Use of the Gospel is immediately founded. This also should be taken notice of in Justice to the Gospel, That it cancels no Obligation of natural Religion; for it justifies us, not by disannulling the Law of Nature, or any Part of it, but by acquitting us of the Punishment which the Lawgiver had a Right to inflict in Consequence of Transgression. An Offender may be pardoned, the Law yet retaining its full Force and Virtue: And this is the Case here. For as the same Apostle speaks in another Place, *The Law is holy, just, and good*; * and the Promise under the Gos-

* Rom. vii. 12.

pel, is made to those only *who walk not after the Flesh, but after the Spirit*. The Gospel therefore diminishes nothing from the Law, but only changes the State and Condition of Offenders. And thus far, I hope, it is clear, that the Law of Nature is not hurt by the coming in of the Gospel. But the Question still is, Where is the Advantage of it? And this we are now to answer. In order hereto, let us take this Matter from the beginning, and see in what Light the Scriptures have placed it.

In the History of the Creation, as given us by *Moses*, we learn, That the first of human Race were under an express Law from God, not to taste of the Fruit of one particular Tree in the Garden of Paradise, upon Penalty of Death in case of Disobedience. Nevertheless, that *Adam*, seduced by his Wife, and she by the Devil under the Form of a Serpent, did transgress this Law of God, and thereby brought Death upon themselves and upon all their Posterity after them. This is what the Apostle distinctly means by *the Law of Sin and Death*; to wit, that Law of Death which passed upon all Men in consequence of *Adam's* Transgression, as he speaks, *Rom. v. 12. &c.* And thus far, I hope, it will not be said, that the Christian Religion supposes any Thing absurd and unreasonable. It is easy enough for a Man to make himself merry with the Story of *Eve*
 I and

and the *Serpent*, as he may with any thing else; but when all is said, no one can prove it to be a Contradiction to Reason, that God should give such a Law to *Adam*; nor shew that when he had transgressed that Law, God had not a Right to destroy him. Nor can you say there is any thing unreasonable in supposing that the Sentence which passed upon *Adam*, should be made to extend to his Posterity: For God might, if he had so pleased, have punished *Adam* with present, immediate Destruction; the Consequence of which, must have been the Destruction of the whole Race of Mankind then in his Loins. Now if it is not unreasonable to say, that in Consequence of *Adam's* Sin, God might not have suffered us to have been born, there will be yet less Reason to pretend, that being born, we ought not to have been made subject to Death.

Whether the Words of the Penalty annexed to the Law given to *Adam*, *In the Day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely dye*, were intended to import that *Adam* should instantly be cut off upon his Transgression, or only that he should thenceforth become mortal, the sacred History does not expressly tell us. But there is great Reason to follow the common Interpretation. For it is not to be supposed that God meant to terrify *Adam* in vain, by denouncing a Sentence which he did not mean to execute.

Now it is certain, that in the former Sense, the Sentence was not executed; for *Adam* did not die till above nine hundred Years after. But in the latter Sense it was fully verified; and we have all experienced, or shall in our Turns experience the Truth of the same Threatning, repeated to *Adam* after his Transgression, *Gen. iii. 19. Dust thou art, and unto Dust shalt thou return.* All this implies, that the State intended for Man, if he had continued innocent, was a State of immortal Happiness. For to suppose that Man should have died, whether he had sinned, or whether he had not sinned, is a Contradiction to the Supposition that the Law of Mortality passed upon him as a Punishment for his Transgression.

Here then you see a State of immortal Happiness lost by Sin; after which *Adam* had certainly nothing to expect but Death, sooner or later, to fall upon him. A Restoration to eternal Life after Death, he could not hope for without a new Promise; for he had forfeited all Pretensions which might arise from his first Estate: And the Sentence which created the second, gave no sort of Intimation that God intended any such thing. To comfort him under this sad and deplorable Condition, and to shew him that God had not entirely cast him off, a Promise was presently made him, that *the Seed of the Woman should bruise the Serpent's Head,*
Which

Which Words, in the general Signification of them*, must be understood as importing, that *through the Seed of the Woman, Mankind should be delivered from the Curse of the Fall.* And if we interpret them according to the Light given by subsequent Revelations, the Meaning couch'd under them will be found to be this, That "Jesus Christ
 " the Son of God, born of a Woman, should,
 " in God's appointed Time, offer himself as
 " a Sacrifice to atone for the Sins of the
 " World; and that through him Death at
 " last should be destroyed by the Resurre-
 " ction to eternal Life."

This Promise, subsisting in all Ages, under greater or lesser Degrees of Manifestation, till it was fully made known by the coming of Jesus Christ, is what we properly mean by the GOSPEL COVENANT. And supposing the Account given above to be true, it is impossible to say that there was no Occasion for it. For when Mankind was doom'd to Death by the express Sentence of God, what room can there be to pretend, that an express Promise was not then necessary to convey to them the Assurance of being one Day restored? If God had permitted *Adam*, without any such Promise given, to have propagated a Race of Sinners, the moral Proofs for a future State might have offered themselves so long as such a Sense of

* See Bishop *Sherlock's Use of Prophecy, Disc. 3.*

God had been preserved in the World, as was sufficient to lead Men to take notice of them. But besides that the bare Supposition of a future State does not (as I shall shew presently) imply any such Restoration as the Gospel proposes, there is all the Reason in the World to believe, that if such a Remedy had not been intended, *Adam*, and in him all Mankind, would presently have been destroyed. The Scripture, I confess, does not any where expressly say thus much; but I think it manifestly implies it. For it was at the very Time when God pronounced the Sentence, that he gave the Promise; which plainly shews, that in the Wisdom of God it did not seem fit, that Man should live one Day without it. So that upon this Foot it must be considered as owing to the Gospel, that there is a Race of Men now in Being: And will you yet say that the Gospel was not necessary? It will little avail to alledge, that the History of the Fall, as deliver'd by *Moses*, may be a Fiction. For the Question at present is, Whether, admitting the Gospel to be a divine Revelation, (and consequently, the Scripture History to be true,) it assigns a Cause of its being introduced, worthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God. If you say, that the Cause now assigned is not worthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, you are at liberty

liberty to shew it. But if you cannot, you are not at liberty to assume, before the Truth of the History comes in proof, that the Gospel is a needless Provision. But to wave all this; let us take Matters just as we find them, and see whether the Prospect of future Happiness, given us by the Light of Nature, deserves to stand in comparison with the Hopes administered to us by the Gospel.

Whether it be true or not that *Adam* first sinned, or whether Man was created mortal, or made so by Sin; thus much I suppose will be granted, that we are all of us Sinners, and therefore all stand in need of Forgiveness. This the Gospel offers to all on condition of Repentance, and that in so full and ample a manner, as to assure us, that at what time soever we shall turn unto God, we shall be accepted, as having *fulfilled the Righteousness of the Law*; and after Death be raised up again to a State of eternal Life and Glory. The Question then is, Whether the Light of Nature, unsupported by Revelation, can give us any such Assurance as this: And that it cannot, I look upon to be one of the clearest Cases in the World. Repentance indeed is what Nature directs us to, as the most likely Means of reconciling us to God, if it could be prov'd that any thing that we could do would be accepted as sufficient. But how far the Effect

fect of it will reach, Reason alone cannot shew us; and in particular, it is not plain from Reason, that if a Sinner repents, his Condition towards God will hereafter be as good as if he had not sinned. To ascribe any such Virtue to Repentance, without Warrant from God, is mere Confidence and Presumption. All Arguments from what is customary among our selves must be weak and insufficient. A good *Father* will generally forgive his Son, when he repents and amends; a good *Master* his *Servant*; and a * *generous Man* his *Enemy*; because we find by Experience that it is the wisest way so to do. But we do not know enough to say what is best and wisest for God to do, unless he himself tells us what he intends to do; because we do not understand the whole Compass of those Reasons, by which the Counsels of God are influenced and directed. The End for which God created Man was to make him happy. A State of Happiness therefore there must have been appointed for him in the Decree and Foreknowledge of God; and if we should say, that he would have continued for ever happy in this State, if, during the time of his Trial, he had continued always obedient, we shall go to the very utmost Length to which mere Reason will carry us. But what Alteration Sin might make in the Case,

* Christianity as old, &c. p. 391.

how it might disqualify us for the Happiness intended for us, or in what Method God might have thought it proper to have satisfied his Justice, even in shewing Mercy to repenting Sinners; these are Questions in which no Principles of Reason can satisfy us.

The unequal Distribution of Good and Evil in this Life, is an undeniable Evidence that there shall be a future State. But how does this prove that God will hereafter shew no Severity even to good Men, as a Punishment for those many Faults with which their Virtues have been defiled? Though we consider them as good Men, still we must consider them as Sinners; and if it is certain that Matters will be so ordered in the next World, as that when the Reckoning comes to be cast up, every Man shall be a Gainer in Proportion to his Virtues; the same Men may yet (for ought that this Argument shews to the contrary) be also Sufferers by their Vices, with respect to some other State of Happiness which was intended for them, and which they might and would have attained unto, if they had preserved their Innocency entire. In this Life we see that it many times pleases God to chastise those with Sufferings, whom in other respects he treats with Mercy and Tenderness: And how could we have been secure that he would not do so in the next

too, when 'tis considered, that the very best of us have deserved Evil at God's hands, as well as Good? This Life is but short; and the Evils that good Men suffer, supposing them as great as you will, are not so great, but that even a shorter Life than this hereafter might make them ample Satisfaction. Let us suppose the Recompence to be made, and that having no longer any Merit to plead from their Virtues, their Vices alone remain to look them in the Face, and tell them that they are now become God's Debtors. Can Reason, unsupported by any Promises from God, assure us beforehand, what we are to expect in such a Case as this? Is it a just Inference to say, that because, so far as we have been better than others, we have received a proper Reward, therefore we shall be liable to no Account, as to those numberless Instances in which we as well as others have been found wanting? We are very apt, when we are thinking of a future State, to frame in our Minds the Idea of a State where we shall enjoy endless unmix'd Happiness; and upon Christian Principles all this is right. But we greatly impose upon our selves, when we graft those Notions which we first learn'd from the Gospel, into our Enquiries concerning mere natural Religion; which, I am persuaded, affords no just Foundation to support such high Conceptions about a future State, as
some

some at this time a day are wont to talk of.

If we look into the Writings of Moralists, ancient or modern, we shall find much said in favour of the Soul's Immortality. But whether this is a Point capable of sufficient Proof from natural Principles, I very much question; and some of the wisest of those who have appeared as Advocates for this Opinion have doubted themselves. It is, I must own, a very pleasing Reflection to those who have any Confidence in their Virtues, to consider that this Life is only a Passage to an immortal State. For who would not desire to be, if he was assured he might be for ever happy? But surely there is no Man who wishes to be immortal, who must not also wish for better Arguments to convince him that he shall be so, than the Light of Nature affords. For, not to enter into that nice Dispute, (of which, I conceive, we understand nothing) Whether the Soul, being a Spirit, can be destroyed otherwise than by Annihilation; it is certain, that he who gave the Soul its Being, can, when he pleases, deprive it of Being, as he can every thing else: And whether the sinful State of Man might not administer Reasons sufficient, why God should at some time or other deprive it of Being, will be the Point in question. That it might administer such Reasons, we in-

deed have little Cause to say, who believe the Gospel: But should any one who denies the Gospel affirm, that no such Reasons could possibly arise, he would say, if I mistake not, a great deal more than he would find himself able to prove.

The Result of the Whole is this; That our Knowledge concerning a future State from mere natural Principles, is wrapp'd up in great Obscurity and Uncertainty, and nothing comparable to those clear Apprehensions which we have gained by the Light of the Gospel. One thing farther there is to be taken notice of, which is, that the Doctrine of the Resurrection has no Foundation in natural Religion. For if Reason shews that we shall live hereafter, it does not follow from thence, that our Bodies shall be raised. This perhaps may appear of small Consequence to some, who will be apt to suggest, that the Resurrection of the Body has no Connection with the Happiness of a future State, which may be as perfect, if the Soul alone be suppos'd to survive the Body. But how does any one know this? The Gospel plainly supposes the contrary: And therefore whatever proves the Truth of the Gospel, will also prove its Usefulness in this respect. — But to leave these Uncertainties: What if every thing which the Gospel teaches concerning a future State were capable of being prov'd by natural Princi-

Principles? Will any one pretend to say, that it is not much better secur'd by the Promises of God? That there are Difficulties attending this Question all know, but those who have never well consider'd it: And what if some few, of greater Reach and Penetration than the rest, have been able to see through these Difficulties, and to make all things clear to their own Understandings? What is this to the Bulk of Mankind, who 'tis certain are not qualified for such Enquiries? If the Hopes of eternal Life, as offer'd by the Gospel, are in the Nature of them very powerful Motives to Virtue and Piety, as they undeniably are, they cannot be offer'd in too strong and too convincing a Manner; and a Revelation once received, and admitted as such, is a much more easy and ready Kind of Evidence, than any Philosophical Reasonings from the Nature of the Soul, and the general State and Condition of the World, can possibly be. The natural Proofs of a future State, be they better, or be they worse, have never lain within the Reach of many: They have served for the Conviction of here and there one; but the Notions which the Generality of Mankind have had of this Matter, have never been theirs any otherwise than as Custom and Education has made them so. This was one Reason why the Notion of a future State

State was so much corrupted in the Heathen World. Men set out with such Opinions as their Nurses or their Mothers taught them; and not being able to enter into the abstruse Reasonings of the Philosophers, so far as to be able to set things right, were doom'd to perpetual Ignorance and Mistakes. The Case would be just the same now, if we had nothing else but Reason to trust to. For Mankind is not alter'd in this Respect; and there are thousands who can turn to their Bibles, and read there what is declared concerning the Pardon of Sin and eternal Life, who would be very much at a loss what to say, if they should be called upon to give any other *Reasons of the Hope that is in them*.

Together with the Hopes of the Gospel, it may be also proper to mention the Terrors of the Gospel; which, as it promises eternal Life to those who shall embrace it, so, to those who shall reject it when offer'd, it threatens eternal Condemnation. If I should say, that the Certainty and Eternity of Hell Torments can be proved upon natural Principles, I am sensible that I should very much displease some, who make it an Objection against the Gospel, that its Laws are enforced by so severe a Penalty. I do not indeed believe, that mere Reason can shew us how long, or how much God will punish Sinners; but we have great Cause to believe

believe God, when he tells us that he will punish them for ever. God may annex to his Laws what Sanctions he pleases, and no Man has Reason to complain of the Severity of them, who is warned of them beforehand, and may avoid them, if he pleases, upon the most favourable Conditions; especially considering that there are such great and precious Promises to weigh against them on the other Side. If God will reward us eternally if we do well, why may he not be permitted to punish us eternally, if we do wickedly, and die in our Sins? There is no Principle in Reason that can shew this to be unjust or unmerciful; for Justice and Mercy are directed by Wisdom; and Reason cannot shew us, that to punish Sinners eternally is repugnant to the Wisdom of God. What we know of the general Scheme of Providence, with respect to created Beings, probably bears a very inconsiderable Proportion to the whole. But unless we know the whole, how should we judge of the Fitness of its several Parts? Or how shall we be able to say, upon our own Knowledge, whether it be proper, or not proper, that God should punish Sinners eternally? There is no need for me to enter into those Niceties that have been grafted upon this Subject. If the Gospel does not threaten *eternal* Condemnation to the Disobedient and Impenitent, it lays more upon us than, had we been left only
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to our own Reasonings upon the Case, our Partiality would probably have permitted us to have laid upon ourselves. And let any one now consider, whether the Gospel, thus guarded by Promises on the one hand, and by Threatnings on the other, is not a very proper Means to restrain Wickedness, and to beget in the Minds of Men an Awè and Reverence for the Majesty of God. The Hopes of the Gospel are proper for all, as they minister the best Encouragements to Well-doing; and Fear is as necessary to govern many, who have not that Ingenuity of Temper as to be influenced either by the Excellency of Virtue, or by the Excellency of that Happiness which shall hereafter be the Reward of Virtue. I doubt there are many who would be willing enough to make the most of this World, if they were not afraid that they should pay too dear for it in the next. They would be contented to die without Hope, if they were assured that after Death there would be nothing to be afraid of. And therefore when once Men are so far entangled in their Vices, as to lose all Courage and Resolution to shake them off, they are apt to stifle these natural Fears; to frame to themselves large and unreasonable Apprehensions of the Mercy of God; and to hope, at least, that Moralists carry their Rules too high, when they tell us that he will punish us for pleasing ourselves, and

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following those Appetites which Nature gave us. This Spirit, which corrupts the Notion of Virtue, and leads Men on insensibly from lesser Degrees of Wickedness to greater, receives a very proper and necessary Check from the Threatnings of the Gospel, which are an express and positive Warning against such Delusions; and Men must be stupid, who can flatter themselves with the Hopes that their Vices shall hereafter be treated as harmless and innocent Pleasures, when they hear them condemned, as it were, by a Voice from Heaven, saying, *Go ye Cursed into everlasting Destruction.*

The severer the Sentence is, the greater Effects may be expected from it: And is there any thing wanting in the Gospel to make it terrible? No; the great Complaint with some is, that the Gospel threatens too much; too much, indeed, for those who will not repent and amend. But this very Consideration shews the Power of the Gospel, that those who are resolved to go on in their Sins, cannot be easy under it. And do you want any better Argument to convince you of its Usefulness? It is very true, that the Gospel has not always its due Effect in reforming Mens Lives. There are many who believe that everlasting Fire is prepared for the Ungodly, who yet behave themselves as if they believed it not. But this Observation will not shew that the Gospel

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spel is useless, but only that the Tempers of some Men are so bad, that the best Means will not do. By how much the Penalties of the Law are less, by so much the more are Men likely to offend. But Men may be wicked under any Provisions that are consistent with Liberty; and whatever is inconsistent with Liberty, is likewise destructive of all Religion.

It remains now only, that I make a brief Remark upon one Circumstance in my Text, which concerns the Person through whom God was pleased to admit sinful Man to a State of Reconciliation: *God sending his only Son in the Likeness of sinful Flesh, and for Sin condemned Sin.* The Meaning of which Passage is this, that the Appearance of Jesus Christ the Son of God in the Flesh, and his offering himself up as a Sacrifice for the Sins of the World, is the true Foundation of our Acceptance with God, and of his restoring us again to eternal Life in Consequence of our Repentance. Why God would not be reconciled to us without this Atonement, he has not thought fit to reveal, and therefore it is not safe for us to determine. But doubtless, what he intended we should learn by it, and what we cannot help observing, if we duly consider it, is, That Punishment is the unavoidable Consequence of Sin, and that if he shews Mercy, it will be in such a Way, as at the same time to give full Evidence

Evidence of his Justice. If God had declared his Readiness to forgive merely upon our Repentance, his Goodness to Sinners would not have been less, but we should not have had the same Proof of his Severity, as the requiring the Sacrifice of his Son, ere he would be reconciled, necessarily implies: So that you see the Gospel has every way provided for the Reformation of the World, offering Pardon upon such Conditions, as that the worst of Sinners need not despair; and yet with such Tokens of God's Hatred and Abhorrence of Sin, as will leave them no room to hope for Mercy, if his *Grace* should be offered or *received in vain*. If we believe that our Sins are pardoned through the Satisfaction of Jesus Christ, we have the strongest Motive before us that can be offered to the Reason of Man, so to demean ourselves, as not to forfeit the Advantages of this new Covenant. For by the Greatness of the Price that was paid for our Redemption (which is the greatest we can conceive) we may well conclude, that we are now upon our last Tryal, and that if we are not justified by the Law of Christ, there will *remain no more Sacrifice for Sin, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment and fiery Indignation*.

These Considerations, which I have briefly suggested to you, are enough to shew that the Gospel Revelation, supposing it to be

what it pretends to be, is a Dispensation worthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, as being, in all Respects, adapted to the sinful State and Condition of Mankind, the administering a Remedy to which, was its declared Intention. And from hence you will be enabled to judge of the Reasoning of a * late Writer, who having laid it down as his first Principle, that the Law of Nature is absolutely perfect, infers from thence, that all farther Provisions must be absurd, as arguing *Inconstancy* in God. There is nothing so weak as this Conclusion. The Law of Nature is in this Sense perfect, that it contains a sufficient Rule for the Conduct of Man, considered as subsisting in his original State. But what if that which was originally sufficient, through the Default of Man, became insufficient? Is it any Reflection upon the Wisdom of God, that he thought fit to supply the Defect? If (as I said before) the Law of Nature had been fulfilled, it would have rendered us as acceptable to God, as the Gospel itself possibly can; and upon this Foot the Gospel would have been useless. But when the Law of Nature could not justify, I trust that the Providence of God may at least stand clear of Censure, if he was so gracious and merciful to us, as to give us another Law that should. God's Oeconomy was changed in

* *Christianity as old as the Creation.*

this

this Case; but it was changed, because the Condition of Man was changed, who must either have come upon new Terms with God, or have been left destitute of that Support which was proper in his fall'n Estate, in order to prevent a greater and more extensive Degeneracy.

II.

Let us now consider, What Methods the Providence of God thought fit to make use of in order to support these Hopes in the World. I have already observed to you, that the Gospel came in immediately upon the Fall, and so it ought: For the Necessity of this Covenant being founded upon the sinful State of Man, it should have been cotemporary with it; and *Adam* had certainly as much Occasion for the Comforts administred by it, as any of his Posterity. But tho' *Adam* was the first to whom the Promise was made, yet he was not the last. For in the History of the Old Testament, we find that there was a COVENANT which God calls HIS COVENANT, an EVERLASTING COVENANT, a Covenant in which ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHOULD BE BLESSED, given to *Noah*, to *Abraham*, *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, and at last ending in the Family of *David*. This was only a Renewal of the Covenant given first to *Adam*, and was understood by the Patriarchs, as containing a Promise of their

their Deliverance from the Curse of the Fall, or of a Restoration to that eternal Happiness which was lost by Transgression. * Accordingly the Author to the *Hebrews*, speaking of the Sufferings of the Patriarchs, says, that the Principle that supported them under them was this, *That they confessed themselves Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth; that they desired a better Country, that is, a heavenly.* Heb. xi. 13, 16. But there is no need to go thus low for Authorities. We have an ancient Testimony in the Book of *Job*, (who liv'd in or near the Age we are now speaking of,) which clearly shews what was the Faith of good Men in those Times: *I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter Day upon the Earth: And though after my Skin Worms destroy this Body, yet in my Flesh shall I see God; whom I shall see for my self, and mine Eyes shall behold, and not another.* Job xix. 25, &c. There can be little room to doubt, after what has been offer'd upon this Subject by the learned Writer just now referr'd to, whether these Words are to be understood of the Resurrection to eternal Life. Now wheresoever *Job* had this Knowledge, whether from some special Revelation vouchsafed to himself, or

* Those who would see this Point accurately handled, may consult the present learned Bishop of *Bangor's Discourses on the Use and Intent of Prophecy.*

from the Tradition of his Forefathers, it will come exactly to the same thing. If he had it from Revelation, it is unreasonable to suppose that this was a Favour peculiar to himself; and that *Abraham*, with others who were Heirs of the Promises, had not the same Light as well as he. If from Tradition; this Tradition must have been derived originally from the Gospel Covenant. With this Account of the Religion of the Patriarchs, that of those who liv'd under the Law perfectly agrees: For concerning these likewise the Apostle says, that *they were tortured, not accepting Deliverance, that they might obtain a better Resurrection*: Of which the Prophets in these Times gave great and strong Intimations. As, *Isaiah Chap. xxvi. ver. 19. Thy dead Men shall live; together with my dead Body shall they arise: Awake, and sing, ye that dwell in the Dust; for thy Dew is as the Dew of Herbs, and the Earth shall cast out the Dead.* Again: *I will ransom them from the Power of the Grave, I will redeem them from Death. O Death, I will be thy Plagues; O Grave, I will be thy Destruction.* *Hos. xiii. 14.* And *Daniel* yet more clearly, *Chap. xii. 2, 3. Many of them that sleep in the Dust of the Earth shall awake; some to everlasting Life, and some to Shame and everlasting Contempt.*

To come now to our Point; to wit, the Methods made use of by Providence to support

port and keep alive these Hopes in the World: Under which Head, the first thing that offers itself as worthy our Consideration is this, That *immediately after the Promise was given to Adam, an OUTWARD RELIGION was appointed, consisting of PRAYER and SACRIFICE.* Before the Fall we read of no external Worship: And whether, supposing Man had always continued in a State of Innocency, there would have been need of any, it may be questioned, but is not worth the while to dispute. This is certain, that Sin entering into the World, and Corruption by Sin, outward Worship became necessary, as a Security against that Corruption; that when Wickedness should increase, (as it did soon after) the Knowledge of the true God might not be lost, nor that Covenant be forgotten, by which God had promis'd to restore Mankind; the Hopes administered by which were so necessary to support the Religion of the World. That Sacrifices were originally of God's own Appointment, the Scripture does not say; but there is great Reason to believe that they were. Their coming in so early is a very strong Presumption in favour of this Opinion, and the Nature of the thing plainly shews it. For how should it enter into the Heart of Man to imagine, that the slaying of a Beast, done in consequence of *no* Command of God, should have any

any Virtue to expiate Sin? It was God's Law to every Creature in which was the Breath of Life, that they should *be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth*: And he had taken so much care to guard this Law, as to give no Permission to *Adam* or his Sons to use them as Food. So that setting aside all Warrant from God, it might be doubted, at least, whether the taking away the Life of a Beast was not an unlawful Action: So little room is there to pretend, that Reason could recommend it as a proper Act of Religion. The Appointment of Sacrifice naturally implies the Appointment of Prayer, to which it has a necessary Relation. For he that offers Sacrifice must be suppos'd to do it under a Sense of his Wants, a Desire of God's Favour, and the proper Dispositions of Trust and Confidence in him, as the Sovereign Lord and Disposer of all things; which is, I think, the Whole of what is comprehended in the Notion of Prayer.

As the History of *Moses* is silent as to the Author of this first Worship, so it is likewise as to the End for which it was appointed. But Reason shews that the general Intent of all Acts of outward Worship must be the same; and what this is we may plainly gather from many Places both of the Old and New Testament. When God gave Circumcision to *Abraham*, he declared the

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Reason of it in these Words; *It shall be a* **TOKEN** *of the COVENANT between me and you,* Gen. xvii. 11. So when the Pas-
 fover was appointed to the Jews, God says, *And it shall be when thy Son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By Strength of Hand the Lord brought us out from Egypt, from the House of Bondage:—And it shall be for a* **TOKEN** *upon thine Hand, and for Frontlets between thine Eyes,* Exod. xiii. 14, 16. And a little before; *And thou shalt shew thy Son in that day, saying, This is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt: And it shall be for a* **SIGN** *unto thee upon thine Hand, and for a* **MEMORIAL** *between thine Eyes, that the Lord's Law may be in thine Heart,* Ver. 8, 9. In like manner concerning the Sabbath; *Verily my Sabbaths ye shall keep; for it is a* **SIGN** *between me and you throughout your Generations, that ye may know that I am the Lord,* Exod. xxxi. 13. Answerable to all this is the Use of the Sacraments under the New Testament: For (as St. Paul speaks, Rom. vi. 4.) *we are buried with Christ by Baptism into Death; that like as he was raised up from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in Newness of Life.* And when we eat the Lord's Supper, to what end are we taught to do it, but **IN REMEMBRANCE** of Christ; that is, as a

TOKEN of the new Covenant founded in his Blood? 1 Cor. xi. 24.

You see in these Instances the general Purpose of all outward Institutions. They are Memorials of the Oeconomy of God with regard to Men, and set before our Eyes some remarkable Examples of his Power and Goodness, either already done, or hereafter to be done; in view of which we may be led to fear and reverence him as we ought to do. These are Helps very proper to the corrupted State of Man introduced by the Fall; and there can be no question, but that it was with this Intent, that immediately after the Fall, and the Delivery of the new Covenant, an outward Religion was appointed. Between this Period, and the Days of *Noah*, we read of no Renewal of the Promise; the Memory of which might therefore the more easily have been lost, or little attended to, but for this Provision. But when, in Consequence of the Covenant, a Religion was appointed in view of that Covenant, this was a constant Call upon Men to take notice of it; and God's Acceptance of those Services, amounted virtually, on his part, to a standing Ratification. The Writers of the New Testament, every where suppose that the bloody Sacrifices, both under and before the Law, were appointed to prefigure the one great Sacrifice once to be offered up for the Sins of the

World: And if we may suppose that *Adam* had so much Light communicated to him, as to have understood, that *the Seed of the Woman* that was to *bruise the Serpent's Head*, was to be *offered up*, the Institution must, upon all Accounts, appear to have been exceeding natural and proper. With respect to the most material Circumstances, it will likewise be found so, without this Supposition: For the Use both of Prayer and Sacrifice, naturally implies that we are Sinners before God; and the Appointment of these as Means of Reconciliation, imports likewise, that though Sinners, we are not shut out from the Mercies of God, but shall be accepted upon our future Obedience; which are the main Points upon which the whole of Religion turns.

If you say that natural Reason would have directed Men to some outward Worship, without the express Order or Appointment of God, I would desire to know what that outward Worship is? That outward Worship, I say, which all reasonable Men must understand themselves as *precisely obliged* to in vertue of the Law of Nature? For this is the Case. When God commanded Prayer and Sacrifice, Men were *tied down* to these particular Actions. But setting the Commandment apart, how they should have understood that they were obliged either to the one or to the other, it will be a very hard

hard Matter to apprehend. That they should have understood themselves as obliged to offer Sacrifice, I suppose will not be said. And as to Prayer, let us suppose it to be (what it certainly is) a very proper way of acknowledging God's sovereign Dominion over us, and the Relation we bear to him as his Creatures; yet certainly it is not the ONLY proper Way. Every reasonable Action amounts to an Acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty; and supposing a Man to conform himself strictly to the Rules of moral Virtue and Honesty, and to shew in his whole Behaviour, the justest Sense of the Majesty of the supreme Being, abating this only, that he never prays to him, will you say, in the Language of a * late Writer, that such a one *denies God to be what he is?* If God has commanded us to pray to him, our neglecting or refusing to do it, will be a Contempt of his Authority; and this, in Effect, is disputing his Sovereignty, and denying him to be what he is. But if God has not commanded it, the Construction will not hold, unless you could shew that Prayer is necessary to the Acknowledgment of God's Sovereignty, or that the Sovereignty of God cannot be acknowledged by any other way than this: If God had never revealed himself to Mankind, virtuous and good Men (if such there would have been)

* Wollaston's *Nat. Relig.* p. 18. 120.

would

would doubtless, in one way or another, have given proper Evidences of their Piety to the World. But as there are a Variety of Ways of doing this, and the whole Life of a good Man is, indeed, the very best Evidence he can give of his Reverence to the supreme Being; whether the Reason of Men would have led them to any determined solemn Forms of outward Worship, there is great room to question.

It will be to little Purpose to alledge, that in Fact all Nations in the World have made use of outward Worship: For supposing the History of *Moses* to be true (which we have a Right to presume, till good Reasons appear to the contrary) you have there a very fair Account of the Origin of outward Worship; and how a Custom begun in *Adam*, might be derived down to his Children in their several Dispersions throughout the whole Earth, it is easy to understand. This is the only reasonable Account that can be given of the Use of Sacrifices, which in ancient Times was as general as the Use of Prayer. And what is a good Account of the Use of the one, may be as good an Account of the Use of the other.

By all this, I should be loth to be understood as offering any thing in Disparagement of Prayer, which is certainly one of the wisest Provisions that God could have made to preserve a Sense of Religion in the World.

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But it should, I think, be considered as an Appointment of God, relative to his Covenant, and not as a mere human Invention: Upon which latter Foot, a great deal of its Virtue and Propriety will be lost. No Mortal can imagine, that God has any Occasion to be told of our Wants; and upon mere natural Principles, I conceive it will not be easy to shew a Reason why God should be more ready to assist one Man who prays to him, than another who does not pray to him, supposing them both possessed of the same Degree of Virtue. But tho' God has no Occasion to be told of our Wants, we have often Occasion to be put in mind of our Duties, and of the Hopes which lie before us, if we behave our selves in such a manner as becomes us: And when to this End God has, by a special Appointment, commanded us to apply to him by Prayer, we have great Reason to believe that our Obedience shall not go unrewarded, and that we may obtain many Favours from him in Consequence of our Prayers, which will not be vouchsafed us without them. The Things which we pray for, concern either this Life or the next; and with Respect to both, is is * hard to know, by natural Light, how far

* Our Ignorance of what it is proper for us to ask of God, is an old Objection against Prayer; and it is remarkable, that *Socrates* carried it so far, as to say, that it was better *ἡσυχίαν ἔχειν*, to keep Silence till somebody should come to instruct us. *Vid. Plat. in Alcibiad. 2.*

we may go in asking them, without asking improperly. As to the Pardon of Sin, which is the Foundation of all other spiritual Blessings, the Assurance of it flows entirely from the Promises of God, as I have already shewn. Take away these Promises then, and tell me upon what Ground does any one pray that his Sins may be forgiven. Before a Man can ask any thing of God, with Assurance that he shall be heard, he should know that what he is about to ask, is fit for God to bestow: And how can we tell, how far it is proper for him to forgive a Sinner, but from his own Declarations? As to the Things of this Life; those which we desire as good, are many times hurtful, and such as we would not ask, if we could foresee the Consequences of them. But supposing that we should pray to God in general Terms, τὰ καλὰ ἐπὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς δίδοναι, *to give us good and profitable Things*, as the * *Lacedemonians* were used to do, how do we know that we do not ask unreasonably? Sin is a Forfeiture of the Blessings of this Life, as well as of the next; and those very Evils which we deprecate, may, for ought we can tell, be the just Punishment of our Offences. These are considerable Discouragements from Prayer, considered as a Duty of natural Religion. But take in the Covenant, and all these Difficulties will all vanish at once: For *Godliness*

* Plato. *Ibid.*

hath the Promise of the Life that now is, and of that which is to come. And therefore we may come boldly to the Throne of Grace, that we may obtain Mercy, and find Grace to help in time of Need, 1 Tim. iv. 8. Heb. iv. 16. Our applying to God by Prayer, will amount to a Declaration, on our part, of our Trust and Confidence in him, in consequence of his Promises; and his Acceptance of this Act of Worship, in consequence of his own Appointment, will be a Pledge and Earnest, on his part, that he will be faithful in fulfilling his Word.

After all, I do not pretend to say, but that it is possible to contrive an outward Worship suitable to the Religion of Nature, and useful to promote Piety and Virtue. Whatever may be said of Prayer, strictly so called, Thanksgiving, I think, stands clear of all Difficulties; and should any Man accustom himself frequently, either in publick or in private, to the Use of some outward and solemn Act, expressive of Reverence, Gratitude, and Humility before God, no doubt he would be the better for it. But as there is no Principle in natural Reason, that I can see, which precisely binds Men to do this; it is more than probable, that no such Method would generally have been thought of; and the least that can be said, is, that outward Worship is much better secured by the Prescription of God, than it

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would have been, had it been left to the Discretion of Men; who might not have seen the Usefulness of it; or, if they had, might not always have chosen that which is just and proper; of which the many foolish and impious Rites practised among the Heathens, under the Notion of WORSHIP, are a very sad and convincing Example.

It must be confessed, that the Appointment of an outward Religion, had not that good Effect upon the old World, which, in Reason, might have been expected. When once Sin had enter'd, it spread apace, till at last the Wickedness of Men grew so exorbitant, that *it repented the Lord that he had made Man on the Earth, and it grieved him at his Heart*; and he said, *I will destroy Man whom I have created, from the Face of the Earth*, Gen. vi. 5, 6. This shews that this Generation of Men was very bad. But this is no Objection against the Means, which were in themselves wise and good; and bad as the World then was, we cannot say, nor is it reasonable to suppose, that if God had made no such Provisions to secure a Sense of his Providence, it would not have been a great deal worse, or hastened the Vengeance which was e're long to fall upon it. Amidst all this Corruption, the Knowledge of the true God was preserved, *The Earth* (as we read) *was filled with Violence, and the Imagination of Man's Heart was only Evil continually.*

inally: But Idolatry was not known before the Flood, nor for some time after. The Flood brought in no Change as to the State of Religion; nor is there any thing to our present Purpose, material to be taken notice of, till we come to the Call of *Abraham*, which opens a new Scene of Providence, that shall be hereafter considered. As a Conclusion to this Head, I will only observe, in general, that, under every Dispensation, God has appointed some outward Religion, suited to the Exigencies of the Times in which it was given. To say nothing of the *Jewish* Worship, which will be more properly spoken to elsewhere, let us only consider how the Case stands with us at present: We are called upon to assemble ourselves frequently together, for Prayer, for hearing God's Word, and for receiving the Sacrament of Christ's Body and Blood; and every where, and at all proper Seasons, privately as well as publickly, to *lift up holy Hands* by Prayer and Thanksgiving, in view of Promises of God in Jesus Christ. I am sensible that this will have little Weight with those, who may therefore be fond of new Schemes, because they rid them of the Burden and Incumbrance (as they are wont to esteem it) of Positive Duties. But to wise and good Men, it is a Matter well worth considering, whether a Sense of Piety, and the Practice of Moral Virtue, would be

as secure, tho' Men should observe none of these Ordinances, tho' they should never partake of the Sacrament, never attend to preaching, nor ever seek to God by Prayer either publickly or privately. Whatever Reasons there are (and Multitudes there are) to persuade us to the contrary, they are so many Arguments to shew the Usefulness of the Gospel Revelation, to which we are indebted for these wholesome Provisions, and without which, it is morally certain that neither these, nor any thing else equivalent to them, would ever have obtained in general Practice. There is nothing more easy to be observed in common Life, than that in Proportion as Men abate in their Regard to the outward Duties of Religion, in the same Proportion they generally grow estranged from all true Virtue and Goodness; and, if I mistake not, that which with many is one great Objection against the Gospel, is this, That it ties them up too fast to outward Rules, and brings them too much under the Restraint of Discipline. The Reason of the Offence is plain: These Things awaken those Reflections, which it is the Business of bad Men to lay fast asleep, and are too great a Check to licentious and immoral Practices: For if they felt no such Effects as these, why do they complain? But if they do feel such Effects, the Objection answers itself; and instead of detracting from the Excellency

Excellency of the Gospel, must greatly recommend it to all who have the Interest of Religion at Heart, and believe that there is any thing in another World that is worth their looking after.

I am sensible that this Point would well admit of farther Enlargement; and I may perhaps endeavour to do Justice to so useful a Subject, at a more convenient Season. At present, my Design is to lay together, in as short a Compass as I can, the principal Heads from whence the Use of Revelation, and of the Duties relating to it, may be made plain to the Understanding; and I think it appears from what has been said, with how little Reason the Institutions of the Gospel have been represented of late, as * *arbitrary Impositions*; as if God, in requiring the Observance of them, had imposed such Things upon us, * *as have no Relation to the End for which he created us*. The End for which God created us, was, undoubtedly, to make us happy; the Means to which, is the acknowledging his Being and Perfections, the maintaining a constant habitual Sense of the Excellency of his Majesty, and the shewing the Fruits of this inward Principle, in a ready Conformity to every thing that becomes us as reasonable Creatures. Now, if outward Religion has a natural Tendency to awaken the Consci-

* *Christianity as old, &c.* p. 28, 29.

ences of Men, and to enliven and quicken in them a Sense of the Duties they owe to the supreme Being, it has then a very manifest Relation to the End of our Creation; and the treating it as an arbitrary Imposition, unworthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God, can proceed from nothing else but mere Perverseness, and a Resolution not to attend to the plainest and most obvious Things.

III.

The next Method made use of by Providence to preserve the Knowledge of his Covenant, is, *the settling the Commonwealth of ISRAEL*. This Kingdom was not completely established till the Time of *Moses*, after the Deliverance of the Sons of *Jacob* from the *Egyptian* Bondage: But for its first Rise we must go up as high as to the Call of *Abraham*, who was the Father of those who afterwards were to become the People of God: And in all that happen'd to him or his Posterity, we may see the Hand of Providence working towards this great Event.

Between the Flood and the Call of *Abraham* had passed upwards of four hundred Years, within which Period Idolatry had taken its first Rise, and spread it self far and wide. Whether *Abraham* himself was tainted with the general Infection, it is not certain:

certain! This we know, that some of his Family were. However, it appears that he was a Man of that extraordinary Virtue, that God thought him the fittest Person to reveal himself to, and to begin a new Reformation in the World. And therefore, as in the Days of *Noah* God destroy'd all that wicked Generation of Men by the Flood, and only preserv'd *Noah* and his Sons to new people the Earth, and to instil the Seeds of Piety and Virtue into their Posterity; so the new World being now generally corrupted by Idolatry, and God having promised never again to destroy every living Thing, as he had done before, takes another Course, and in a manner creates a new People to be Worshipers of himself, in view of his Promises; of which they were to be the Guardians, till upon the Appearance of Christ all the Nations of the World should be called to Repentance. In what sort the Gospel Covenant was renewed with *Abraham* and his Posterity, it has been already shewn, and needs not here to be repeated. But it may be of use to take notice of some other Matters relative to the temporal Kingdom of the Children of *Abraham*, and to observe by what Degrees it arose, and in virtue of what Methods it was constantly supported.

When God confirmed to *Abraham* the spiritual Covenant, which was to convey a
Blessing.

Blessing to all the Families of the Earth, he at the same time promised the Land of *Canaan* to his Posterity: *And I will give unto thee, and to thy Seed after thee, the Land wherein thou art a Stranger, all the Land of Canaan*, Gen. xvii. 8. But this Promise was not presently to take effect; for he was likewise told, that *his Seed should be a Stranger in a Land that was not theirs, and should serve them, and they should afflict them four hundred Years*, Gen. xv. 13. The Meaning of which is, that the Seed of *Abraham* should be Sojourners, partly in *Canaan*, and partly in *Egypt*, four hundred Years; after the Expiration of which Term they should come and dispossess the present Inhabitants of *Canaan*, whose Iniquities would then be ripe for Vengeance, though at present they were not so; as it follows, Ver. 16. *But in the fourth Generation they shall come hither again: For the Iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*. Here it was that the temporal Kingdom in the Family of *Abraham* was to be erected, in which those great Promises should have their Completion, in which it was said, *I will make of thee a great Nation, — and thy Seed shall be as the Dust of the Earth*. Ch. xii. Ver. 2. and xiii. Ver. 16. In token whereof he now gives him the Covenant of Circumcision: *This is my Covenant which ye shall keep between me and you, and thy Seed after thee: Every Man Child among you*

you shall be circumcised—and it shall be a Token of the Covenant betwixt me and you. Chap. xviii. Ver. 11. This is the only new Institution in Religion that was introduced till the Time of *Moses*: And within this Period the Promise of the Land of *Canaan* to the Posterity of *Abraham* was frequently renewed to the succeeding Patriarchs; the temporal and the spiritual Covenant being constantly connected the one with the other. To *Isaac* God says, *Sojourn in this Land, and I will be with thee, and bless thee: For unto thee and unto thy Seed will I give all these Countries, and I will perform the Oath which I swear unto Abraham thy Father. And I will make thy Seed to multiply as the Stars of Heaven.* Gen. xxvi. 3, 4. In like manner to *Jacob*; *Be fruitful, and multiply; a Nation, and a Company of Nations shall be of thee, and Kings shall come out of thy Loins; and the Land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee will I give it, and to thy Seed after thee.* Gen. xxxv. 11, 12. When *Jacob* was at the point of Death, whilst he and his Family were yet in *Egypt*, he speaks to his Son *Joseph* in these Words: *Behold, I die: But God shall be with you, and bring you again into the Land of your Fathers.* Gen. xlviii. 21. Which Promise is again confirmed by *Joseph* to his Brethren: *God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this*
H Land,

Land, unto the Land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Gen. l. 24.

These Hopes were necessary to prepare them for the Troubles that were to ensue. For now, upon the Death of *Joseph*, or soon after, began their Slavery; for their Deliverance from which, when the Time appointed was come, God raised up a Leader for them, even *Moses*, who brought them forth *by Signs and by Wonders, by a mighty Hand, and by a stretched-out Arm*. From him it was that the Commonwealth of *Israel* received its first Settlement; the various Successes and Revolutions of which, from this Time to its Conclusion, particularly to recount, were a long and unnecessary Work. But there are two Things in general that ought to be taken notice of, *viz.*

1. The Change that was made in the outward State of Religion by this new Settlement. From the Creation of the World to this Time we read of nothing but Prayer and Sacrifice; excepting only that upon the Covenant made with *Abraham* and his Posterity, Circumcision was added, as you have just now seen. But besides all these, the Law of *Moses* prescribes a great Variety of external Performances, consisting (as the Apostle speaks) *in Meats, and Drinks, and divers Washings, and carnal Ordinances*, Heb. ix. 10. It is not certain, that in the foregoing

going Ages there was any divine Law, appointing the Times and Seasons for publick Worship. But now we read of the *daily Sacrifice*, their weekly, their monthly, and their yearly Festivals; the Services to be performed on which are prescribed with the greatest Punctuality and Exactness. If you ask to what End all this served, *St. Paul* will tell you, that *the Law was added because of Transgressions*, Gal. iii. 19. That is, it was added in order to cure them of that Proneness to Idolatry which they had contracted during the Time of the *Egyptian* Bondage. Hard indeed would it be to understand, why God should have imposed such a Burden of Ceremonies, none of them good in themselves, if there had not been something in the Genius and Disposition of the People at that time which made them necessary. But it may be observed, that the Heathens in their idolatrous Worship affected a great deal of outward Pomp and Formality, as they do in most Pagan Countries even to this Day; for which the People of *Israel* having contracted a Fondness during their Stay in *Egypt*, it might be necessary to indulge them in this way, either by adapting old Rites into the true Worship, or by introducing new ones in their stead; which by their Diversity might distinguish them from the Nations around them, and serve as a constant Remembrance

to admonish them whose Votaries they were. This in general seems to be a good Account of the ceremonial Law of the *Jews*, how difficult soever it may be to assign the precise Reason of every particular Appointment, for want of a distinct Knowledge of the Customs of those Times. Wherefore,

2. The next thing worth our Notice, is, The Sanctions which God annexed to this Law, and the visible Tokens he gave from the time of his Residence among that People, and of his exercising a sovereign Authority over them. The Blessing promised in case they adhered stedfastly to this Law, was every thing that is good and desirable in this World; Health, Peace, Plenty, and Victory over their Enemies. The Curses denounced against them in consequence of their Disobedience were the reverse of all this; Sickness, War, Famine, Desolation, and Destruction from the Face of the Earth. Hear with what Solemnity *Moses* speaks to them, *Deut. iv. 1. & seq. Hearken, O Israel, unto the Statutes and unto the Judgments which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the Land which the Lord God of your Fathers giveth you.— Take heed unto your selves lest ye forget the Covenant of the Lord your God, which he made with you, and make you a graven Image, or the Likeness of any thing which the Lord your God hath forbidden you: For the Lord thy*

thy God is a consuming Fire, even a jealous God. When thou shalt beget Children, and Children's Children, and shalt have remained long in the Land, and shalt corrupt your selves, and make a graven Image, or the Likeness of any thing; and shalt do evil in the Sight of the Lord thy God, to provoke him to Anger: I call Heaven and Earth to witness against you this Day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the Land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it: Ye shall not prolong your Days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed. Again, Chap. xxviii. Ver. 1. And it shall come to pass, if thou shalt hearken diligently unto the Voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and do all his Commandments which I command thee this Day, that the Lord thy God will set thee on high, above all Nations of the Earth; and all these Blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee.—Blessed shalt thou be in the City, and blessed shalt thou be in the Field; blessed shall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Ground, and the Fruit of thy Cattle, the Increase of thy Kine, and the Flocks of thy Sheep. Blessed shall be thy Basket and thy Store. Blessed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and blessed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall cause thine Enemies that rise up against thee, to be smitten before thy Face—And all People of the Earth shall see that thou art called by the Name of the Lord, and shall be afraid of thee—But it shall come to pass, if
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thou wilt not hearken unto the Voice of the Lord thy God, to observe and to do all his Commandments which I command thee this Day, that all these Curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee; Cursed shalt thou be in the City, and cursed shalt thou be in the Field; cursed shall be thy Basket and thy Store; cursed shall be the Fruit of thy Body, and the Fruit of thy Land, the Increase of thy Kine, and the Flocks of thy Sheep; cursed shalt thou be when thou comest in, and cursed shalt thou be when thou goest out. The Lord shall send upon thee Cursing, Vexation, and Rebuke, in all that thou settest thine Hand unto for to do, until thou be destroyed——He shall make the Pestilence cleave unto thee——He shall smite thee with a Consumption, and with a Fever, and with an Inflammation, and with an extreme Burning, and with the Sword, and with Blasting, and with Mildew; and they shall pursue thee until thou perish, &c. Nor were these Promises or these Threatnings in vain. For read over the whole History of this People, from the first Establishment, to the Conclusion of the Jewish State, and you will find that their Prosperity or their Adversity, bore a constant and an even Pace with their Obedience, or Disobedience; and that whenever they forsook God, and relapsed into Idolatry, his Hand was visibly upon them, to correct and chastise them. It has very justly

justly been observed by a * learned Writer, that “ as God had established a Law and a
 “ Covenant with the *Jews* upon temporal
 “ Promises, he stood obliged to make good
 “ his Word, and to justify himself to them
 “ in the Administration of temporal Affairs.
 “ For this Reason, a Succession of Prophets
 “ was raised up among them, at whose
 “ Mouths they might receive the Direction
 “ of God ; and whenever it was necessary
 “ to punish the People for their Disobedi-
 “ ence, that they might not be tempted by
 “ the Prosperity of other Nations, and their
 “ own Adversity, to fall away to other
 “ Gods, they were forewarned of the Things
 “ that were to befall them; their Calami-
 “ ties were prophetically described to them,
 “ that they might know whenever they
 “ suffered, that it was the very Hand of
 “ God, their own God, that was upon
 “ them.” Thus did God govern his People
 in a visible Manner, always guiding and
 directing them in the Conduct of temporal
 Affairs, blessing them when obedient, and
 humbling them when obstinate and perverse;
 and thus, under various Turns and Revolu-
 tions of Prosperity and Adversity, the *Jewish*
 Nation continued to be a People distinguish-
 ed from the rest of the World by Laws and
 Constitutions peculiar to themselves, till

* Bishop of *Bangor* on Prophecy, *Disc.* 5. p. 150.

Christ appearing in the Flesh, and that Dispensation taking place, to which the other was intended as subordinate, the whole Polity was dissolved, and they were scattered abroad among all Nations upon the Face of the Earth.

Lay now all these Things together, and let any reasonable Man say, whether Revelation has been of any Advantage to the World. It has served at least to preserve the Knowledge of the true God and his Worship among one, and that a very considerable People, whilst it was lost every where else, not one single Nation excepted. There is no Man of common Sense, but must see, that the chief Support of the *Jewish* Religion was the *Jewish* Polity; and if, as the Scripture represents the Case, this Polity was founded in Revelation, it will follow, that the Knowledge of the true God has been supported by Revelation. And this (you will remember) is all I am concerned at present to shew, *viz.* That admitting the Scripture History, which gives an Account of Revelation, as it has been vouchsafed to Mankind in all Ages, to be true, the Ends and Purposes to which Revelation was given, are worthy of the Wisdom and Goodness of God. But I think that the Consideration of the Difference there was between the *Jews* and other Nations in this respect, that

that whilst these adhered to the Worship of the true God, the whole World besides was over-run with Idolatry, will go something farther, and amount at least to a strong Presumption, that the *Jews* were indeed under the Conduct of divine Revelation. For this Difference must have been founded in something; and what can so readily and so naturally offer itself to our Thoughts, as this, That the *Jews* had some extraordinary Means of Knowledge, which other Nations wanted; and that whilst these were left to the Blindness of their own Understandings, the other were enlightened from above, and received their Religion from the Mouth of God himself? The *Jews* were not the only Nation upon Earth that had Reason and common Sense; nor were they, in their Tempers and Dispositions, more tractable than other People, nor less under the Influence of those Weaknesses and Prejudices which are wont to lead Men aside from the Truth. Their own Writers represent them as a *stiff-necked Generation*, and in Fact it is true; that under all the Advantages they enjoyed, they frequently relapsed into Idolatry, from which they were seldom recovered, without severe Discipline. Yet, in the main, the Knowledge of God was preserved pure and untainted, and their Worship (how superstitious soever it may appear to some) stood clear,

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at least, of those Impieties which were practised among the Nations all around them. But, How so? A very reasonable Question it is, and withal a very hard one, to be answered by those who throw Revelation entirely out of their Divinity. But take Revelation in, and all will be plain and easy. For it is surely no hard Matter to understand how those should be rescued from the general Corruption, who were under the immediate Direction of God, who manifested himself to them by the Voice of his Prophets; and by a great Variety of extraordinary and uncommon Events, gave them incontestable Evidence of his Presence among them. Those who like not this Account, may give a better when they can; mean while, let them remember this one thing, *viz.* That the best way to judge what mere Reason CAN do, is to consider what it HAS done; and that, in Fact, it now appears, that during the Time of the *Jewish* Dispensation, and in all the Ages that went before it, natural Religion has never subsisted in any tolerable Degree of Purity, but among those concerning whom it is very far from being a clear Case, that they did not enjoy the Benefit of Revelation. But to proceed.

When JESUS CHRIST appeared in the Flesh, Revelation was calculated to do proportionably so much more Service, as the Light

it gave was clearer and stronger. And the Effect of it was for a long time very visible in the rooting up Heathenish Idolatry and Ignorance out of the far greatest part of the known World. For the Corruptions that have happened since, I think, we are not answerable; for the best Means may become ineffectual through the Iniquity of Men. When God has to do with Men, he deals with them as such; that is, as free Agents; and if the Means of Reformation be in themselves right and proper, our Abuse of those Means will not alter the Nature of them so, as to make them otherwise than what they are. Consider Christianity as it was left us by Christ and his Apostles, and no Exception can lie against it, as a Means unfit to secure the Purposes intended by it. View it as it subsists in some Communions (that is, as some Men have made it) and there will be found, in many Respects, sufficient Cause for Complaint. And yet surely a Man must know little of the World, who does not think that Christianity, in its most frightful Dress, is far preferable to the Pagan Worship. Judge, in this Case, just as you please; it will little affect the Argument under Consideration. Corruptions there are, 'tis confessed, and how they came in, it is no hard Matter to understand. Those who learnt Christianity from the

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Mouths of the first Preachers of it, were in no Danger of mistaking its Meaning. But as the antient Traditions began to wear off, the Sense of the Scriptures (which were then the only Guide) began, in many Points, to be disputed. These Disputes mixing themselves with the Passions and Interests of Men, and God not interposing, in any visible Manner, to make any farther Discovery of his Will, the Evil daily increased, and old Mistakes made way for new ones to follow. There is nothing in this, but what is natural in all Cases of the like sort. And what is the Consequence? Why, this only, That a good Religion may be spoiled; and that the less clear the Evidence from Revelation grows, the more certainly and necessarily will Corruptions arise and multiply. This Consideration surely has little Tendency to shew the All-sufficiency of natural Light. So far from it, that I think a Man would give much better Proof of his good Sense, if instead of turning Revelation out of Doors, as a needless thing, he should wish for some farther Assistance of this kind, to silence those Disputes which now distract the Christian World, to the great Prejudice of revealed Religion, and of natural Religion too.

As to any Objections which may arise from any supposed Defect in the Promulgation

tion of the Gospel Covenant, they are entirely foreign to the present Question. Yet I cannot help taking notice of one very gross Mistake which has been obtruded upon us of late, *viz.* That according to the Christian System * *God left Mankind for four thousand Years together——destitute of sufficient Means to do their Duty, and to preserve themselves from sinking into a corrupted and degenerate State.* By this, I presume, it is intended we should understand, that from the Creation of the World to the Coming of Christ, *Mankind were left destitute of sufficient Means, &c.* Whereas it is evident, that the Gospel Covenant came in as soon as there could possibly be any Occasion for it, and is as old (not indeed as the CREATION, but which comes little short of it,) as the FALL of *Adam*. This Covenant, to those who embraced it, was as an effectual Means of Salvation before the Coming of Christ, as it has been since: Which is what *St. Paul* means to teach us in his Epistles to the *Romans*, and the *Galatians*; where he speaks of *Abraham* as *the Father of us all*, and sets forth his Justification as the Pattern and Example of ours. It would be very hard to understand this, if either there had been no Covenant then subsisting, or we were to consider *Abraham* and our selves

* *Christianity as old, &c.* p. 375, 390, 401.

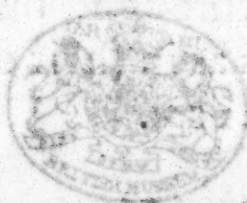
as under different Covenants. But supposing a Covenant common both to him and us, it is plain, that as he was justified, so are we justified, *i. e.* by Faith in the Promises of God, accepting us to Pardon and Reconciliation through the WOMAN'S SEED, whose *Day* (as our Saviour speaks) *he saw*; that is, to whom he looked as then a coming, and we as already come. The Case was just the same under the Law of *Moses*; the giving of which (as the same Apostle argues, *Gal. iii. 17.*) did not *disannul* the Covenant, but left it subsisting in its full Force and Vigor. Curious Men will be apt to ask, why God revealed himself to the Seed of *Abraham* only, and not to all other Nations, as well as to them? As also, why at this time a day so great a Part of the World is suffer'd to lie involv'd in Pagan Darkness and Superstition? To this, and all other Questions of this kind, it will be sufficient to give this short and general Answer, That the Difficulties which attend them, be they greater or be they less, have no Tendency to shew that Revelation, where it is vouchsafed and admitted, is a useless thing, (which is the only Point in question) but only to impeach the Providence of God, in not granting to others those Helps which we imagine they ought to enjoy as well as we. Difficulties there may be in these Points; but I am not at present concerned
to

to settle them. It is enough for me, (as it should be, I think, for every body else,) that God knows best how to govern the World; and that if we are determined never to acquit his Providence, till we can give a good Account to our selves of the Reasons of his Dealings with regard to Men, there must be an End of all Religion, whether revealed or not revealed. And this is the great Fault I find in this new Attempt to set up natural Religion upon the Ruins of Revelation, that there is no such thing as carrying it through, but by the Help of such Principles as in their direct Consequence lead to A T H E I S M.

To conclude: You may see from the Whole, in what Sense the Gospel is a R E P U B L I C A T I O N of *the Law of NATURE*. Natural Religion is its Foundation, and the Support of it the ultimate End of all its Doctrines and Institutions. This does not imply, that there are no Duties incumbent upon us in consequence of the Publication of the Gospel, but what we were before obliged to by the Law of Nature; because considering the sinful State of Man, it is very possible, that some farther Provisions may be necessary to guard and secure the Law of Nature. That this is in fact the Case, and that the Gospel hath made such Provisions, I have (as I hope) abundantly shewn.

shewn. And therefore it is a vain thing to pretend to object the Uselessness of the Gospel, in Disparagement of any direct Evidence which may be brought to prove that it came from God. To such Evidence we desire to appeal; and it will be time enough in all reason to give up our Religion, when it is shewn that this Evidence is insufficient.

F I N I S.



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